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SUBJECT: BADR IN BASRAH: A CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: The General Secretary of the Badr Organization in Basrah, Hassan Al Rashid, and three colleagues attended a luncheon hosted by Regional Embassy Office (REO) Basrah on April 10. During the lunch Al Rashid discussed the inability of the provincial council to deliver basic services to the citizens of Basrah and blamed the council for the deteriorating security situation. Al Rashid indicated that a coalition might be formed in the council that would have enough votes to oust the current governor from office. End summary.

¶2. (U) On April 10, REO Basrah hosted a lunch for members of the Badr Organization in Basrah. The General Secretary, former governor and current Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) member Hassan Al Rashid attended the lunch along with three lower ranking Badr colleagues. The lunch was held by REO Basrah to broaden and reinforce our contacts with the Badr Organization.

¶3. (C) Discussion during the lunch covered various subjects. The main topics were the political and security situations in Basrah, and Al Rashid made the following points:

- Dissatisfaction exists among many BPC members with the current BPC leadership, and members of Badr/SCIRI, the Basrah Islamiyah list and members of the National Accord may join forces to "change the council and how it is operating." Public dissatisfaction with the BPC is high, with people complaining about the BPC not able to ensure that even basic public services are available. Comment: A possible alliance solely among members of the above lists would not be sufficient to comprise the two-thirds needed to fire the current governor, Muhammad Moassibh Al Wah'il. It is evident, however, that Al Rashid is working to reach that end. End comment.

- Al Rashid does not agree with the boycott of the British and the Danes and believes that the only way forward is through dialogue. He said that when he was governor, there were open lines of communication between all the different political and social groups in Basrah. Without giving specifics, he also chided the REO for not doing more to help end the stalemate.

- Al Rashid concurred with REO personnel that the security situation in Basrah has worsened in recent months. He placed the blame for this squarely on the BPC and its inability to provide the leadership necessary to bring the situation under control. To illustrate how much security has deteriorated in Basrah, Al Rashid said that when he was governor he had only one bodyguard and no guards at his residence. Governor Muhammad travels with a complete security package.

- He stressed that Badr Organization is no longer a militia but a political party fully invested in the political process. He placed particular emphasis on Badr's efforts to work within the

political system to effect change in the BPC.

14. (C) Comment: Although Al Rashid normally weighs his answers to questions very carefully and rarely offers candid insights, it is clear that he would like the BPC to vote Governor Muhammad out of office. He referred to a split in Fadillah and the need for establishing a responsible government in Basrah. If the governor were voted out by the BPC, Al Rashid would be a strong candidate for the position. (Septel will report on prospects of Al Rashid becoming governor.) From the REO's viewpoint, this would be a welcome change. Though Iran still has influence with Al Rashid, he would be his own man and likely would work to improve the security situation and the delivery of services by the local government. End comment.

15. (C) Biographic note on Hassan Al Rashid: Al Rashid was the previous governor of Basrah Province before Governor Muhammad. Soft-spoken and thoughtful in his speech, Al Rashid is unlike other Basrah politicians and does not bluster and talk ill of other politicians. He was arrested multiple times during the previous regime and lived in Iran off and on during the 1980s and 1990s. After fleeing to Iran in 1991, he joined the Badr Corps. Al Rashid is the contact person for Iran in the Badr Organization and travels there - and elsewhere in the region -- frequently. He was born in 1967, is married with four children and holds a master's degree in Military Science. Despite his time resident in Iran, he speaks little Farsi and claims that he lived in a community with other Iraqis while he was there. End bio note.

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